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National School Lunch Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Food and Nutrition Service
Washington, D.C.

7095214

FNS-78
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The purpose of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), as declared by Congress in the National School Lunch Act, is to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children. Since 1946, the NSLP has made it possible for schools to serve nutritious lunches to students each school day. States receive Federal reimbursement and other assistance in establishing, maintaining, and operating the program.

HOW IS THE NSLP ADMINISTERED?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the NSLP at the Federal level. Within each State, the State educational agency operates the program through agreements made with local schools or school districts. In certain residential child care institutions and private schools, the program is administered by an FNS regional office.

WHAT SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS CAN PARTICIPATE?

Any public school of high school grade or under is eligible to participate in the NSLP. Any nonprofit, private school of high school grade or under, whose average yearly tuition does not exceed \$1,500 per student, can also participate. Public and licensed, nonprofit, private residential child care institutions such as orphanages, homes for retarded children, and temporary shelters for runaway children are also eligible.

ARE THERE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION?

To participate in the NSLP, schools and institutions must agree to:

- * Operate food service for all students without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap.
- * Provide free and reduced-price lunches to students unable to pay the full price, based on income eligibility criteria. Such students must not be identified nor discriminated against in any manner.

This is an equal opportunity program. If you believe you have been discriminated against because of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap, write immediately to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

- * Serve lunches that meet the nutritional standards established by the Secretary of Agriculture.
- * Operate the food service on a nonprofit basis.

WHAT REQUIREMENTS MUST LUNCHES MEET?

To qualify for Federal reimbursement, schools must serve lunches which meet meal pattern requirements specified by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The lunch pattern is designed to provide, over a period of time, approximately one-third of a student's Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA's) for key nutrients. The lunch must be planned to offer each student five items: a specific amount of meat or meat alternate, two or more vegetables and/or fruits, whole-grain or enriched bread or bread alternate, and fluid milk as a beverage. Minimum amounts of food items are specified for various age/grade groups. Schools and institutions may expand on these amounts and add more food items at their discretion. To encourage consumption and promote participation, schools should serve a variety of foods and types of milk, taking students' preferences into account.

MUST STUDENTS TAKE ALL THE FOOD THEY ARE OFFERED?

Students must be offered all five food items of a lunch. However, students in senior high school may decline up to two food items. Also, they may request smaller portions of food items that would otherwise be declined. Local school food authorities can extend this "offer versus serve" option to elementary, middle, and junior high schools. The price of the lunch to the paying student is not reduced when items are declined.

DOES THE NSLP ENCOURAGE STUDENT AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

Schools are required to promote activities involving students and parents in such areas as menu planning, forming taste test panels, enhancing the eating environment, promoting the program, and organizing joint student-community activities supporting the program.

Schools are encouraged to teach students about good nutrition practices, and to involve the school faculty and the general community in activities to enhance the program.

HOW IS ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE LUNCHES DETERMINED?

By law, students of families meeting specified income criteria receive lunches free or at a reduced price. Eligibility determinations are made by an official at each school, and are based on family size and income information provided on an application submitted by a parent or guardian. Participating schools and institutions

send information to parents and the news media each year to explain how families can apply for free and reduced-price lunches.

School food authorities must ensure that students who receive free or reduced-price lunches are not overtly identified by making them use special tickets or by any other means, and that such students are not required to work for their lunches, do not use separate dining facilities or lines, and do not have a different choice of lunch from those students who pay the full price.

WHAT FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DO SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS RECEIVE?

A basic amount of Federal financial assistance is provided for all lunches served, whether paid, reduced-price, or free. Additional financial assistance is provided for each reduced-price and free lunch served to eligible students. These rates of reimbursement are adjusted annually in accordance with changes in the Consumer Price Index.

The Department of Agriculture also provides donated commodities for lunches served under the program, and technical assistance and guidance to assist State agencies and schools in operating the program.

WANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

For additional information, contact the State director of school food services in your State department of education, or write to the appropriate FNS regional office below:

Northeast Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
33 North Avenue, Burlington, Massachusetts 01803

(Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York,
Rhode Island, and Vermont)

Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Mercer Corporate Park, Corporate Boulevard, CN 02150,
Trenton, New Jersey 08650

(Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey,
Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Virginia, Virgin Islands, and
West Virginia)

Southeast Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
1100 Spring Street N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30367

(Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina,
South Carolina, and Tennessee)

Midwest Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
50 E. Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois 60602

(Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin)

Southwest Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
1100 Commerce Street, Room 5-C-30, Dallas, Texas 75242

(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas)

Mountain Plains Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
2420 West 26th Avenue, Room 430D, Denver, Colorado 80211

(Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota,
South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming)

Western Regional Office, FNS, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
550 Kearny Street, Room 400, San Francisco, California 94108

(Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho,
Nevada, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon,
the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, and Washington).

Further information may also be obtained from the School Programs Division,
Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center
Drive, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

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